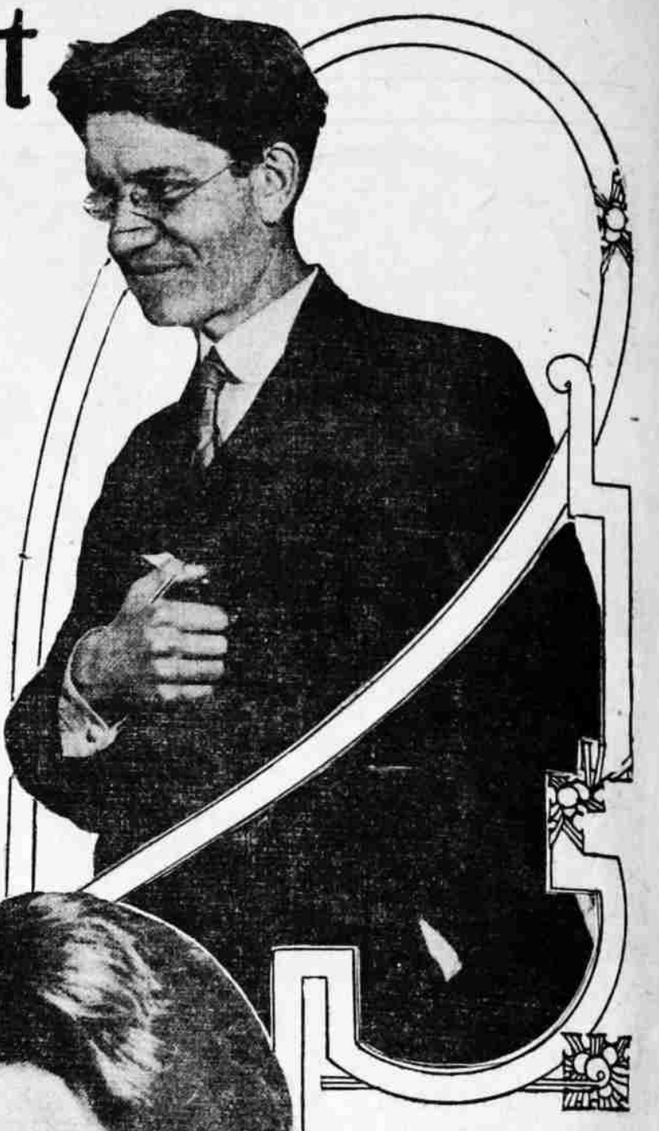
"This Nation Must Learn How To Play"

Percy MacKaye, Author, Dramatist and Pageant Master, Says Gigantic Out-of-Door Pantomimes Will Do Much to Teach Americans How to Take Recreation.



"Americans must learn to play to make their lives really worth living," declares Percy MacKaye, dramatist, author, poet and pageant director, of Cornish N. H.

"The average American has been so busy chasing the dollar that he never has learned the art of proper recreation. The consequence is that when he has leisure time, time to spare from money getting, he is at an absolute loss to know what to do. And he seizes upon the crudest, most uncouth forms of recreation, which he doesn't really enjoy, but which he grasps as the best obtainable.

"Now, if he had learned how to play when a boy, or had studied and practiced the art in manhood, he would be enabled to get real recreation, real, exquisite pleasure. It would make his business life, his home life, vastly better.

"The hope of the play education of the coming generation lies in the civic theater, organized play and the pageant. And the greatest of these is the pageant.

"Why? Because it awakens civic pride, in both the child and the adult. It gives the child impressions which last through his life and it starts the adult thinking along lines absolutely new to him.

"Let me explain. The average American looks upon his city as a piece of land full of houses, where he does business, and lives. Beyond that it means nothing to most of us. He does not realize that it means the embodiment of the work, the ambitions and the hopes of thousands of men and women.

"But when we see the pageant unrolling the history of the city in a magnificent spectacle, dramatizing the crisis of the city's life before our very eyes, we realize that we are but a very small factor in the upbuilding of such a monument to progress.

Real Meaning of History Is Shown.

"We see that everyone has played a part, and that the growth of a city is one of the most marvelous things imaginable. We gain a conception of the real meaning of history, and scenes familiar from childhood take on a new meaning.

"Then we become proud to live in a city where such things as are portrayed in the pageant have happened. We make up our minds to do our part, small though it may be, and leave the pageant field resolved to become better citizens.

"The same thoughts, though vastly more impressive, come to the child, and he has the time to let them sink in before they are driven out by the cares of life. When he reaches manhood they are a second nature. For instance, take the New England schools, with which I am very familiar.

"In the classes there every morning the children rise and salute the American flag. They are taught to take off their hats as the colors pass in a parade, to stand when the "Star Spangled Banner" is played, to reverence the veterans. And, as a consequence, when they are older these things mean something to them, and they are filled with the ardent patriotism so necessary to the welfare of a nation. The pageant does the same thing for the city.

"Now a pageant should be a play in itself, not a mere portrayal of history, a sort of Gettysburg panorama. It should have a plot, a climax, and the spectator should be keyed up to a high pitch of anticipation all the time.

"I'll give a good example of what a pageant will do. Some years ago I produced my pageant "The Canterbury Pilgrims," at Gloucester, Massachusetts.

"Now to the person who knows Gloucester the place would appear to be most unpromising. It is nestled among the cruel, rugged cliffs of New England, on Cape Ann, and if not the largest, it is the most famous fishing port in the United States.

Gloucester People Made Grim by the Sea.

"The people there have the grim spirit of the place. The men wrest a hard-earned living from the sea at the peril of their lives, and are hardly ever at home. The women, too, are grim, almost believing in predestination, so used are they to the spectacle of the fishing fleet coming back from the Grand Banks with the flag at half mast, bringing the tidings of a ship lost at sea, run down, perhaps, by some liner in a fog, or of a husband, father, brother, or lover swept overboard and drowned. The constant sight of the rows on rows of headstones marking unfilled graves in the cemetery keeps them sad.

"I went there to talk pageantry. 'The Canterbury Pilgrims' was not a story of Gloucester, at that. When I entered the City Hall it was filled with those grim, weather-beaten fishermen, and my heart sank. I thought I never could appeal to them.

"To my intense surprise, however, they became enthusiastic, and once they took hold the idea rapidly crystallized. When it was time for the pageant to be produced, in the spring, most of the men made arrangements to be at home for the occasion. A liberal appropriation was made to advertise the event far and wide and the result was that a 100,000 people who never had thought of going to Gloucester thronged its narrow streets and the event was so marvelously successful that the date has been set apart as an annual holiday.

"The people should play, and play en masse. Look at Italy, where whole communities attend the opera. Those people have a love of the beautiful, a love of music that is inherent in them, and they know how to use their spare time."

MacKaye knows whereof he speaks. He is a born poet, a born lover of the beautiful. It is inherent in him. His father, Steele MacKaye, began his professional life as an artist in France, and after the destruction of his Paris studio in the Franco-Prussian war and the loss of all his belongings came to New York and drifted into the drama, where he made a phenomenal success.

MacKaye's Father Was Highly Successful.

He was that rare man, an actor manager, and a good one. He opened the Lyric and the Madison Square theaters in New York, and wrote several remarkable successful plays, some of which even today are great favorites with stock company audiences.

MacKaye's mother was descended from early Puritan stock, her ancestors settling in Massachusetts just twelve years after the Pilgrim Fathers first sighted Provincetown in 1620. His maternal grandmother was the president of one of the first colleges for women in New England, the home of American colleges.

So it will be seen that MacKaye came by his literary talents from both sides of the family. Indeed, his mother's charming dramatization of one of Jane Austen's books recently attracted universal favorable comments in dramatic circles. As a boy he was raised in the stage wings and his first essay at song writing was made in 1892-93, before he entered college, when he wrote the lyrics for his father's magnificent production commemorating the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Pecuniary losses caused by the panic of 1893, however, caused the abandonment of the pageant, and MacKaye's aspirations were condemned to wait for a later opportunity.

In the fall of 1893 he entered Harvard and was graduated as a Bachelor of Arts in the class of 1897. While in the university, though Harvard did not at that time offer the magnificent dramatic course which now is an important part of the curriculum, he made a special study of the theater and one of his plays was acted by a combined cast of Harvard and Wellesley students. It was "Saphpho," a Greek tragedy, and an extremely difficult undertaking for one of MacKayes' limited experience, but even today he believes it was one of the most successful productions he ever has staged.

Weds Sweetheart of His College Days.

Within a year after his graduation he married a young woman of Cambridge, Mass., whom he had courted during his college days, and the two went to Europe together, where MacKaye made a further study of dramatic art. While in Italy he wrote several plays, and then he went to the University of Leipsig, where he took a course in Anglo-Saxon and made a particular study of Beowulf, the earliest epic in the English tongue. The result of this study was Fenris, the Wolf, which he has since produced with gratifying results on the American stage.

On his return to the United States MacKaye taught for four years in a private school for boys in New York, and then the attention of E. H. Sothern was called to his dramatic ability. As a result of Sothern's urging MacKaye wrote the "Canterbury Pilgrims," and started on his real dramatic career.

Soon afterwards MacKaye gave up his summer residence at Shirley, Mass., where his family had lived for generations, and joined the colony at Cornish, N. H., which was founded by Augustus St. Gaudens. He immediately sprang into favor with the artists there and was appointed to write the prologue to the outdoor pageant which commemorated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the beginning of the literary colony. In this he was remarkably successful.

Only last summer MacKaye wrote "Sanctuary," a plea for the birds, an out of door masque which attracted nation-wide attention from the fact that Eleanor Wilson, the president's daughter, participated. With her were a score of society girls who summer in the vicinity.

Miss Wilson's dancing was so attractive and her success so pronounced that she recently refused an offer of $10,000 to write a play in which two New York actresses wished to star.

Incidentally, MacKaye's play was responsible for the prohibition of importing aigrettes into the United States. He made a strong appeal for the preservation of the white heron, which supplies the plumes for the aigrettes and which is in danger of becoming extinct.

As the President's daughter was taking part in the event, of course the President had to see it, and Mr. Wilson managed to get away from Washington for the one day necessary to be present at Cornish, where he had sent his family for the summer. He and the politicians with him were so impressed by MacKaye's presentation of the white heron's case that when they returned the anti-aigrette statute was insgrted in the tariff bill.

Loves Life in the Fields and Woods.

MacKaye is a nature lover. He asks nothing better than to get out in the open fields and woods, away from people and walk for hours, studying the wild life. He has chosen his home at Cornish with an eye to beauty. Cornish is hidden away among the foothills of the Green and White Mountains, on the border between Vermont and New Hampshire. Around it are the New England pines, and looking from the windows one sees the silvery ribbon of the Connecticut River winding through the valley. It is the magnificent New England scenery at its best.

He dislikes strongly to be compelled to leave his home to go to Boston or New York, and is highly elated when he returns. In the summer he may be found on the links, the tennis courts or canoeing on the Connecticut; in the winter, skating or sledding. Sometimes skiing parties are arranged, in which MacKaye is a leader.

"I believe that sort of a life, the closeness to nature, the study of natural existence, helps one to a proper appreciation of the beautiful," he declared one day. "I know myself that it makes me better fit for grappling with the questions of human life.

"If a man once gains a thorough appreciation of what is good in life it will remain with him always. It will help him in his work and in his play. It will bring big things into his life. Events never become sordid to him. Instinctively he looks for what is good, and always finds it. There is some good in everything.

"It is my ambition to be of help in arousing all the cities of the United States to the necessity of civic play. I want to see every citizen of every municipality take a vast pride in his city, in his State and in the national government. I want him to realize what the past history of the country means and how he can help in building up the future history so that it will be great.

"How a pageant will do this I have explained before. All that remains is to produce the pageant, and I am willing to do my utmost to bring a success to any city that undertakes this form of recreation. I will do the same for any city which wants to establish organized play or a civic theater."

Mr. MacKaye has already been of immense assistance to some municipalities in this very line of work. He has only recently returned from California, where he took an active part in staging several pageants, and in Margaret Anglin's open air production of "Antigone," the Greek tragedy, in the redwood district. The famous accress made such a success in this trial that soon afterward she scored heavily in "Elektra," one of the most difficult of all the Greek plays, and then entered the Shakespearean tragedy, in which she is the idol of the theater goers along Broadway this season.

Helps Harvard Men in Their Dramatic Work.

Many of MacKaye's plays have been produced by the Harvard Dramatic Club, a particularly effective organization, before they have been given to the public. MacKaye takes a great interest in the dramatic work of his alma mater and is always among the first to offer help when the Harvard students are arranging an unusually difficult production.

He is a member of the Players' Club and the Harvard Club of New York and can always be found at one of the two houses when in the city. He is more than welcome there and the members hail him with joy for they know that they will hear a totally new fund of stories and ideas, with which he constantly is primed.

Although MacKaye is in a sense cosmopolitan he retains the ingrained characteristics of a New Englander. He is quiet and reserved, but of the keenest intelligence and appreciation. When he talks he is earnest, never seeming to waste a word, and is thorough in whatever he undertakes.

He is slightly nervous, the result of constant application to his studies, and when conversing is continually fumbling at something, unconsciously, though always keenly observant of what is being said to him and weighing each word he speaks when he answers a question or expresses an opinion.

He is so much in earnest about his pageants, his organized play, that he has written a book in their behalf which he calls "The Civic Theater." In it he explains his hopes and ambitions, and outlines what he thinks the civic theater should be and how the city administration should take up the plan.

One of his children he hopes to make a writer. She is his oldest daughter, 11 years old, who, two years ago, had a poem published in Harper's Monthly, a feat which many an older writer would like to accomplish. His son, a boy of 15, is fitting for Harvard, but is more of a mechanical and inventive adept. He has one other daughter, a little girl of 5. With these three and his wife he is perfectly happy.

MacKaye Is but 38 With Career Before Him.

MacKaye is but 38 years old, and his future is before him. In the opinion of the leading litterateurs of the country he will become a writer of tremendous influence among the better educated class of people. His earlier writings showed a deep study and a very mature thought and these characteristics have become more prominent in his later works. He is writing thoughts which will last, although they may not become popular over night.

"Better not to be popular at all than to work harm to the people by popularity," is MacKaye's motto. "I would rather remain unknown than to sign my name to some of the trash that nowadays is being sold as literature."

Percy MacKaye in three poses.

$100,000,000 VANDERBILT BABY BEING REARED IN SIMPLE LIFE

Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt, Jr., 10 months old, heir to $100,000,000, American by parentage but English by birth, is enjoying his first taste of the simple life as it is lived in these United States, at Oakland farm, six miles from Newport, R. I., the summer home of A. G. Vanderbilt, Sr.

On the huge estate, famous the world over for its blooded stock, the young heir to the Cornelius Vanderbilt millions is spending the long, placid days, filled with eating, sleeping and mild exercise. He has been there since his arrival from England last week.

With a few exceptions his routine, his clothes and his surroundings in general are little different from those of any 10-month-old child with parents in comfortable circumstances.

His daily life is much in contrast to little Vincent McLean's, a near neighbor, also heir to a good many millions. There are no armed guards, no elaborate sets of burglar alarms, no private detectives about the Vanderbilt place as there are on the McLean estate. Of course, the Vanderbilt child is not left playing carelessly about for anyone to pick up and carry off at will, but one nursemaid usually is his sole attendant.

This maid, though, is a zealous guardian. Woe be unto any of the other servants who attempt to pet her charge. She is an English woman, named Reid, and she doesn't believe in the promiscuous handling of infants. If a second man or footman has the temerity even to poke a finger into the chubby side of the Vanderbilt hope he earns a sharp reprimand in a decidedly English accent.

She is kept constantly on the watch to prevent caresses from the other servants, for the boy is a favorite with everybody from the butler down to the chauffeurs. Any admiration for the child by outsiders she wishes expressed at a respectful distance.

If she had been with A. G. Junior the other afternoon a reporter never would have seen the baby. However, she had gone in the house for a moment on an errand and had left the child lying in a hammock on the back veranda, which is fitted up as an outdoor nursery.

There he lay, the heir to $100,000,000, all crumpled up, one hand under his cheek, and a leg doubled beneath him. There was nothing to distinguish him from any other child of his age. His clothes were not expensive, apparently. A rattle with a gold handle lying in the hammock was the only sign of wealth.

The most noticeable thing about him is his hair, which is a deep black and slightly curly—regular Vanderbilt hair, just like his father's.

One of the luxuries enjoyed by Alfred Gwynne, Jr., that is denied to the majority of children is the privilege of being fed with milk from the greatest Jersey cow in the world, a cow that is worth several thousands of dollars.

Broughton Dorcas is her name, and she has taken blue ribbons and medals without number at the various fairs and stock shows around the Eastern circuit. The milk is of the creamiest—just the sort to furnish a bright, young millionaire's daily meals.

The cow is milked by a machine, operated by a graduate of an agricultural school, clothed in white duck. Young Vanderbilt appeared to take little interest in the milking of Dorcas. His time was occupied for the few moments he was in the stable in watching the nervous flicking back and forth of Dorcas' tail, as she endeavored to flip off the few flies that had been inadvertently allowed to sneak into the stable.

Once he was permitted by his nurse to pet the cow. He accompanied the petting by various indistinguishable remarks which are not capable of reproduction on paper.

His maid is assisted by a trained nurse, who looks after the baby's diet and other matters pertaining to health. She directs his clothing, his baths and his exercise.

There are three parts of the low-eaved farmhouse that are sacred to the heir apparent. They are the day nursery and the outdoor nursery on the first floor and the night nursery on the second floor.

The outdoor nursery is simply a converted veranda. It has been fitted up with cool, green, wicker furniture of child's size and two big sleeping hammocks, arranged so that when the sun shines warm on one the other can be used. The veranda is completely inclosed by Venetian blinds, and on three sides there is a high ledge.

The day nursery is a large bewindowed room facing the south. Like the outdoor nursery, it has wicker furniture. One corner is all of glass, a regular sun parlor. Around the wall above the wainscotting is a frieze representing a circus parade; elephants, clowns, giraffes, monkeys, lions and all the rest of the menagerie parade around in still life for the benefit of the baby heir.

Child verse subjects take the place of the circus parade in the night nursery frieze. Right at the foot of his white enamel bed are "Wynken, Blynken and Nod," who went to sea in a boat; there is the old woman who resided in an abandoned shoe; the cow that hurdled the moon and Mr. and Mrs. J. Spratt.

There is little furniture in the night nursery, for Baby Alfred is being reared according to the most scientific methods, and a lot of chairs and other unnecessaries are dust gatherers.

Off the night nursery is the bathroom, with three tubs; one large enough for the boy to have a regular, honest-to-goodness swim, another a sitz bath and another a footbath. Everything in the bathroom is of white steel, with the most sanitary bathroom fixtures to be had.

Alfred G., Jr., is an early riser. It is seldom that he isn't ready to get up by 7 or 8 o'clock at the latest. He makes his wants known by a private signal code that only he and his maid know. Before he takes his bath the trained nurse looks him over for any possible signs of illness and takes his temperature. If he is all right he is carried to the bathroom for his warm tub.

It is at this time of the day that he has the most fun. For, like other gentlemen born, the Vanderbilt heir is fond of his bath. He splashes around like a young porpoise, and always finishes off with a shower of much cooler water than is already in the tub. He always protests when his nurse takes him out for a brisk rub down with soft towels.

He breakfasts informally, usually in a bathrobe. As yet his food is served to him in an ordinary bottle with an ordinary nipple.

When he has been dressed he is ready for his morning ride. For this he has his own carriage, horses, footman and coachman. The horses are two undersized bays, of good breeding and classic outlines, just the team for a baby millionaire. The carriage is a little model coupe, painted blue with the monogram A. G. V. in gold on the panes—the Vanderbilt livery colors.

The coachman and footman are two of the oldest horsemen in the Vanderbilt service, and they hope some day to take Alfred, Jr., under their tutelage and give him the proper understanding of horseflesh so he will be as good a stock judge as his father.

The drive usually lasts for a couple of hours, sometimes around the winding roads of the 700-acre estate, sometimes along the public roads in Portsmouth Township, where the farm is located. Many times he is accompanied by his mother; always by a maid.